A DISCOURSE Concerning the BEAUTY OF Providence.

The Fourth Edition.

By *JOHN* L. Bp of *Chester*.

Psal. 25. 10. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep his Covenant and his Testimonies.*

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THE PREFACE TO THE *READER.*

Amongst all other Doctrines, *this of* Providence (*though it do properly belong to* Natural Theology, *yet*) *is of as Uni-*

verſal concernment both for knowledg and practice, as any other point, in Chriſtian Divinity.

The very Heathen have acknowledged, not only a Univerſal *Providence of God, which puts the* general *kinds of things into a regular way of working; But his* particular *Providence likewiſe, which takes care of* Individual *Perſons and Actions. Why elſe do all Religions oblige men to pray unto Him, and to expect His ſpecial aſſiſtance, in every kind of*

of want or neceſſity?

But now, though this common Principle be ſo univerſally acknowledged in the Notion *of it, yet men are generally very negligent in the* practical *application of it to particular times and conditions; and ſo loſe that comfort and ſatisfaction that may be reaped from it.*

It is the chief aim and buſineſs of this Diſcourſe, To convince and quicken men unto this duty, as being by ſo much the more ſeaſonable for theſe times,

by how much the preſent troubles and confuſions do now call upon us for it.

It cannot but occaſion ſome ſuggeſtions of Diffidence and Infidelity, to conſider thoſe many ſtrange revolutions and changes in the world, which in outward appearance ſeem ſo full of diſorder and wild contingencies. And therefore it muſt needs be of ſpecial conſequence for a man to have his heart ſtabliſhed in the knowledg and belief of this truth here inſiſted upon.

In

In all Ages of the world men have been much ſtartled in their judgments by that unequal diſpenſation which ſeems to be in theſe outward things, That one event ſhould be to the righteous and the wicked. *Nay*, That a juſt man ſhould periſh in his righteouſneſs, and the wicked ſhould proſper in his wickedneſs. That on the ſide of the Oppreſſor there ſhould be might, and the oppreſſed ſhould have none to comfort them. *This hath ſometimes ſo amazed and perplexed*

Pſal. 73. Jer. 12. Eccl. 9.2. Ch. 5. 15. Ch. 8.14. Ch. 4.v.1.

perplexed the thoughts of conſidering men, that whilſt they looked barely upon events, they could not tell how to extricate themſelves from theſe difficulties; which occaſioned that ſpeech of

Ch. 7. v. 7. Solomon, Surely oppreſſion makes a wiſe man mad; *that is, puts him to his wits end, tranſports him with wild imaginations, whilſt he knows not readily what to anſwer in defence of ſuch proceedings.*

But now he that ſhall ſeriouſly conſider how every thing is managed by

by an All seeing Providence, *which is exactly careful, and infinitely wise, such a man will be easily satisfied, that in all these obscure administrations (which seem unto us so full of casual, negligent, promiscuous events) there is an admirable (though unsearchable) contrivance.*

As for the particular design which Providence may aim at in some dispensations, this doth not always fall under our reach. It is the glory of God to conceal a matter. *And many of his works are so* Pro. 25. 2.

ſo ordered, that though a man labour to ſeek
Eccleſ. 8. 7. 1. them out, yet he ſhall not find them. *Yea further*, Though a wiſe man think to know them, yet ſhall he not be able to find them. *And therefore, where we cannot underſtand his ways, it is there our duty, with an humble reverence to believe and admire the wiſdom of them.*

How would this (if rightly conſidered and applied) ſilence all thoſe unſeemly murmurings and complaints of men in theſe times? Remember

member, there is nothing befalls us but what the counſel of God had before determined to be done. *And he can order things for the beſt, as well when they croſs our deſires, as when they comply with them.* Acts 4.28

And therefore when you ſee the violent perverting of judgment and juſtice in a province, marvel not at the matter. *That is, Be not tranſported with wonder, or impatience, or unbelief, as if the Providence of God were regardleſs or negligent:* For he that is higher Eccl. 5. 8.

then

then the higheſt regardeth. *Though they that have the higheſt power amongſt men may be ſo far from* remedying, *that they rather* encourage *ſuch diſorders; yet God hath a ſtrict watchful eye upon them. And though men may be apt to ſecure themſelves in ſuch proceedings, by the greatneſs of their own ſtrength, as if there were nothing above them; yet* there are higher
Ch. 3. 17. then they. *And* there is a time, when God will judg both the righteous and the wicked.

Let

Let us be careful of our own duty, to ſerve Providence in the uſual means, and leave the diſpoſal of events to Him. It ſhould be every man's chief buſineſs to clear up the evidences *of his particular title and relation unto* this great Governour of the World; *and this will be the ſureſt means to ſet us above the fear or hurt of all outward changes.*

We ſee with what artifice and compliance men will inſinuate themſelves into the affection of thoſe who (according

ding to ſeveral revolutions) are advanced into the places of power. Of how much greater advantage would it be, to get an intereſt in his favour who doth and ſhall always rule over the ſons of men, having all times at his diſpoſal, out of whoſe hands no ſtrength or policy ſhall ever be able to wreſt the ſway and dominion of things?

It cannot but afford ſtrong conſolation unto every true believer to conſider, that he who hath the chief influence in all theſe great changes and

and variety of events in the world, is both his God, *and* his Father.

How did this quiet the heart of old Eli? 1 Sam. 3. 18. It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good. *And* David *upon the ſame conſideration profeſſeth,* I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, becauſe thou didſt it. Pſal. 39. 9 *And our bleſſed Saviour himſelf makes uſe of this argument,* The cup that my Father hath given me, ſhall I not drink it? Joh. 18. 11 *Though the potion be bitter and diſpleaſing, yet ſo long as it comes from*

from a loving and careful Father, we have no reaſon to fear any hurt by it.

And on the other ſide, much of mens unquietneſs and dejection, is occaſioned, either by the want of this evidence, or by the neglect of applying it. When they terminate their thoughts upon ſecondary inſtruments, Fearing men that
Iſa. 51. 12, 13. ſhall dye, and the ſons of men that ſhall be made as graſs: forgetting the Lord their Maker, who ſtretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the

the earth. *That is that which makes men to* fear continually, becauſe of the fury of the oppreſſor.

How would it compoſe all theſe fears and diſtempers, if men would but labour after this aſſurance of their intereſt in God, with the ſame zeal and intention of mind wherewith they proſecute their particular engagements and animoſities againſt one another. He that hath God for his ſtrength and refuge, is always ſure to be on the ſtrongeſt ſide, and need not fear the

moſt

moſt tempeſtuous mutations. Though the earth be removed, and the mountains ſhould be carried into the midſt of the ſea: Though the waters thereof roar, and be troubled; and the mountains ſhake with the ſwelling thereof.

Thus much I thought fit to premiſe in the general, concerning the neceſſity and ſeaſonableneſs of this Subject.

As for the particular occaſion of publiſhing this Diſcourſe, I have nothing to ſay but this; That being ſolicited for a Copy

a Copy of it by divers perſons (and ſome of eminent quality) before whom it was occaſionally preached; I knew not any more convenient way to ſatisfie their deſires, then by ſuch a publick communication of it.

I could ſpeak ſomething from my own *experience concerning the efficacy of this Doctrine, againſt thoſe damps and dejections of mind unto which ſuch times as theſe will expoſe a man. It is my hearty prayer, That it may be uſeful to* others *alſo in this reſpect.*

Farewel.

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THE BEAUTY OF *PROVIDENCE.*

Eccleſ. 3. 11.

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: alſo He hath ſet the world in their heart, yet no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

THis *Book* contains *Solomon*'s Experience in his ſearch for Contentment; which being not

to be found amongſt any of the Creatures, he adviſes never to trouble our ſelves in an eager proſecution after them, but to enjoy our poſſeſſions with a cheerful, liberal mind, without perplexing our ſelves in ſuch cares and labours, as may defraud us of thoſe honeſt comforts to be had by them: *For there is nothing better for a man, then that he ſhould eat and drink, and make his ſoul enjoy good in his labour*, ch. 2. v. 24. That is one of the *Concluſions* which *Solomon* infers

infers from his former diſcourſe, and which he further amplifies, and confirms in the following Parts of his Sermon. It being his chief ſcope in this Book, to direct men how to behave themſelves with cheerfulneſs and contentment under all thoſe great revolutions, and that variety of events which may befall them in the world.

This *Chapter* contains a diſcourſe concerning God's government and diſpoſal of times; and is therefore not unfitly

ſtiled, The *Calendar* or *Ephemerides* of ſeaſons: Whence the Wiſe-man with divers arguments urges upon us what he had before commended, A cheerful and contented mind.

The Text is one of theſe arguments; *God hath made every thing beautiful in his time:* that is, There is a wiſe order and contrivance in all the works of Providence: Every particular event is moſt ſeaſonable in that time which God appoints: And therefore we have no

no reaſon to repine at our condition, as if matters did not go well with us; for 'tis impoſſible they ſhould have been better than they are: though they do croſs our private hopes and deſires, yet God beſt underſtands the fitteſt order and ſeaſon for all things, making them beautiful in his time.

Alſo he hath ſet the world in their heart: By [*world*] here is not meant this material world; but *ſeculum*, the ſucceſſion and courſe

of things, as the original word עלם does properly import. This God hath ſet in, or * *expounded* unto mens hearts; that is, he hath endowed us with an ability to diſcern in ſome meaſure that ſeaſonableneſs which he obſerves in the government of the world.

* נתן עבט

Yet there is no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end: that is, 'Tis above human ability to comprehend the reaſon of all divine proceedings; we cannot

cannot find them fully out from the beginning to the end.

Others conceive that the words may be more properly rendred thus: *As long as the world ſhall laſt, God doth reveal unto mens hearts the work which he makes, from the beginning to the end, excepting only ſome things unto which man cannot attain.* As if he ſhould have ſaid, In all ages of the world there are ſtill ſome paſſages of Providence, wherin men may be able to diſcern a beauty and comelineſs, This very ſuitable to the Original.

though there are ſome other particulars which we cannot underſtand. The ſenſe of both Interpretations being for the ſubſtance much alike.

That's the connexion and meaning of the whole verſe. The Text, according to its natural fulneſs, doth comprize in it theſe three particulars.

1. Every thing has its time.

2. Every thing in its time is beautiful.

3. That is the proper

per ſeaſon for all things which God appoints.

1. Every thing has its time. *To all things there is an appointed ſeaſon*, ver. 1. Not only for ſuch natural events as bear in them a kind of neceſſity, as *a time to be born, and a time to dye*, ver. 2. but alſo for thoſe *voluntary* actions that ſeem to be moſt alterable and contingent; *A time to weep, and a time to laugh*, ver. 4. The wiſdom of Providence in the government of this lower world, hath diſpoſed to

every thing its particular ſeaſon. This is that we call the *fulneſs* of time, the *ripeneſs* of ſeaſon. *Prov.* 27.1. the Wiſe man ſays there, that the day brings forth events, *Paritura eſt dies*; alluding to a teeming-Mother, to whom there is a ſet date for her delivery. So doth Time travel with the decrees of Providence, and for each ſeveral action there is a pregnancy, a fulneſs of time.

2. Every thing in its time is beautiful; even ſuch

ſuch matters as in their own natures are not without ſome deformity. *A time to kill*, v. 3. *A time to mourn*, v. 4. *A time of hate, a time of war*, v. 8. The ſcorching of Summer, and the extream cold of Winter, though both in themſelves alike diſtaſtful, yet are comely in their ſeaſons; and thoſe times would not be ſo beautiful without them. Nor is it the natural goodneſs of any thing that can make it comely out of its proper ſeaſon. That which

which

Beauty is in Bodies, and *Harmony* in Sounds, that is *Opportunity* in Time. Now as White and Red, which are the uſual Materials of *Beauty*, as thoſe particular Notes of which *Muſick* doth conſiſt, may be ſo diſpoſed of, as to cauſe *deformity* and *diſcord*: So actions, which in themſelves are good, may be depraved by their unſeaſonableneſs.

3. That is the proper ſeaſon for all things which God appoints: Or thus: Every particular

cular Event, is moſt beautiful in that time which the Providence of God hath allotted to it. 'Tis above the contrivance of Humane Policy to bring matters about in their fitteſt order. And therefore 'twere but folly to conclude, That things do not fall out well, unleſs they anſwer our deſires: for God beſt underſtands the fitteſt ſeaſon for every purpoſe. And whatſoever, or whenſoever he works, you may be ſure 'tis both beautiful, and in its time; Even

thoſe

thoſe Events which do moſt thwart our private Ends (could all circumſtances be duly conſidered) we ſhould find them to be performed in their moſt comely order, and beſt opportunity.

As for the two firſt Particulars, though they are implied in the Text, yet are they moſt expreſly handled in the former *verſes*: And therfore I ſhall paſs them over without any further enlargement, inſiſting only upon this later, as being more directly agree-

agreeable to the main ſcope of the words.

And 'tis a Subject that in many reſpects will deſerve your more eſpecial attention; 'tis not commonly treated of. And beſides, it may very much conduce to our contentment, to ſettle our hearts againſt all thoſe conditions that may befall us in the world. 'Tis of very general uſe and concernment, ſuitable to all times and occaſions: For times of *ſuffering*, to make us patient and ſubmiſſive: For times of

of *mercy*, to make us cheerful and thankful. In brief, it extends to all perſons, relations, buſineſſes, ſeaſons; nothing is more generally uſeful than this, to have our hearts fully perſwaded of that wiſe order and contrivance which there is in the diſpoſal of every particular Event in the world. And 'tis more eſpecially ſeaſonable for times of Trouble and Confuſion, when men are apt to miſtruſt the government of Providence, as if God did

did neglect the care of this lower world; and leave all things to their own jarring-principles. Then (I say) 'tis more especially seasonable to vindicate the care and wisdom of Providence; to shew, That every thing which God doth, is best; and consequently, that those many distractions and confusions under which we suffer, are far better than any other (though the most flourishing) condition could be. And that's the Subject I am now to insist upon.

upon. The point is this:

Propoſ. *Every particular Event is moſt beautiful in that time which the Providence of God hath allotted to it.*

A Truth, by ſo much the more ſeaſonable for theſe times, by how much 'tis now the more difficult to believe it.

The Obſervation lies plainly both in the ſcope of the place, and the moſt obvious ſenſe of the words.

The

The Scripture is copious in other proofs to this purpoſe. *Deut.* 32.4. *His work is perfect, and his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, juſt and right.* Not only his firſt *work* of Creation is exactly good and perfect; but his *ways* of Providence alſo are diſpoſed with judgment and righteouſneſs. Confirmation by Teſtimony Divine.

So again, *Iſa.*28.29. *The Lord of Hoſts is wonderful in counſel, and excellent in working*; that is, every event of So Jer. 32. 19.

of Providence is managed and pre-ordained by an admirable Wisdom, and therefore must needs be of *excellent* contrivance.

And again, *Dan.* 2. 20, 21. *Wisdom and might are his: he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and he setteth up kings:* Job 36. 5. Those two Attributes of *Strength* and *Wisdom* are for the most part put together in Scripture. God never shews any Argument of his *Strength*, but his *Wisdom* is engaged in it also.

alſo. Thoſe great alterations and ſubverſions which happen in the world, do not more demonſtrate the greatneſs of his *Power* in the doing of them, than the greatneſs of his *Wiſdom* in diſpoſing of them for the beſt.

And again, *Pſal.* 104. 24. *O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.* Which is as well true of the works of *Providence*, as of the works of *Creation.*

But

But this Truth is more directly intimated by that Vision of *Ezekiel* in the first chapter of his Prophecy, wherein he doth express how all Events in the world are wisely disposed of by the care and government of Providence. The scope of that Vision was, To confirm the faith of the Prophet in the certainty of those things which he was to foretel; because God himself, by whom he was inspired, had such a special influence in the orderly

derly managing of all inferior Events.

Though matters might ſeem *to run upon wheels* (as we ſay) to follow their own courſes, without any ſpecial guidance; to go at random; yet *theſe wheels have eyes in them*, v. 18. that is, there is the eye of Providence, which directs them in their revolutions. And then beſides, theſe wheels are likewiſe *governed by the four living creatures*; that is, by the Angels of God, who are fitted for all their ſer-

2 Chron. 16. 9. Prov. 15. 3. Ver. 10.

ſervices, with four remarkable Endowments.

1. With Wiſdom and Prudence, typified in that Viſion, by the *face of a man.*

2. Courage and Reſolution, *the face of a Lion.*

3. Sedulity and Diligence, *the face of an Ox.*

4. Swiftneſs and Diſpatch, *the face of an Eagle.*

In all which, the Prophet doth at large explain unto us, with what deliberate care and fore-caſt the Providence

dence of God doth disposse of all these inferior Events.

This Truth may yet be further evidenced, from the very Light of Nature, and the Testimony of the Heathen. Hence was it that the Ancients did set forth their gods with Harps in their hands, to shew the harmony they observed in the government of the world. And *Midas* was condemned to wear Asses ears, because he preferred *Pan*'s Pipe before *Apollo*'s Lute; Humane Policy

Humane Testimony.

Bacon's Sap. Vet.

Policy before Divine Providence.

Nay, the Devil himself doth acknowledg the wiſdom and ſeaſonableneſs of Divine proceedings, and therefore would fain have ſheltred himſelf under this pretence: *Mat.* 8. 29. *Art thou come to torment us before our time?* Implying, that it would not become the God of Order to do any thing *untimely.* And doubtleſs that muſt needs be an evident and a great Truth which is confeſt by the mouth

mouth of ſo great a Liar.

For the further confirmation of this, let us a little conſider ſome of thoſe rugged paſſages of Providence which ſeem to be performed with the greateſt negligence and deformity.

Look upon the Hiſtory of *Joſeph*: He was (you know) one of the promiſed Seed, concerning whom God had foretold a ſuperiority and dominion over the reſt of his Family. Now, that after this, Exam-ples.

he ſhould be expoſed to the treachery of his malicious brethren: that beſides his nearneſs to ſlaughter from their hands, he ſhould be ſold into a far Countrey, whence there was no hopes ever to hear of him again: That there he ſhould be ſo endangered by the rage of a luſtful woman, and ſuffer ſo tedious and unjuſt an impriſonment; all this might ſeem to be an overlight and neglect of Providence, as if it had forgotten the promotion which *Joſeph* was

was deſigned to. And yet do but reflect upon the later part of the ſtory, and you ſhall find, how all theſe misfortunes did mightily conduce, not only to his advancement, but all to the ſafety and preſervation of that whole Family, which was then the viſible Church. So that if each of his brethren had given him as much money as they ſold him for, it had not been ſo great a kindneſs as he received from their intended Cruelty.

It is an elegant gloſs

of St. *Gregory* upon this ſtory, *Divino judicio quod declinare conati ſunt, renitendo ſervierunt: Ideo venditus eſt à fratribus* Joſeph *ne adoraretur, ſed ideo eſt adoratus, quia venditus.* It was ſo ordered by Providence, that what they ſought to decline, they did promote, even by their ſtriving againſt it; *Joſeph* was therefore ſold by his brethren, that he might not be worſhipped, and yet he was therefore worſhipped, becauſe he was ſold. *Sic divinum conſilium*

dum

dum deviatur, impletur; ſic humana ſapientia dum reluctatur, comprehenditur. Even ſo the Divine Counſel is accompliſhed in being oppoſed; ſo Humane Policy is defeated by the means of promoting it.

Thus alſo is it in the Hiſtory of *David:* He was (you know) deſigned to a Kingdom; but how many ſtraits was he put to before he attained it? Being forced into the wilderneſs like a wandring out-law, and followed there by a company *David.*

of diſcontented perſons, who was as ready (perhaps) upon every trivial occaſion to revolt from him, as before from *Saul*. But, above all the reſt, his laſt diſtreſs was one of the moſt deſperate, when he was ſpoiled at *Ziglag*, not only of his goods, but his wives and children too, when his own Soldiers in their mutiny and diſcontent were ready to ſtone him; there being then but little hopes to ſave his life, much leſs to get a Kingdom. And yet this diſtreſs alſo was, in the event

event of it, contrived to his advantage. For having afterwards purſued the *Amalekites*, he not only recovered his own, but got alſo ſuch abundance of other ſpoils from them, as ſerved him for rich Preſents, whereby he might renew and confirm the friendſhip of his well-wiſhers in *Iſrael*; that after the death of *Saul* (which preſently follow'd) he might by their free votes be choſe to ſucceed him, 1 *Sam.* 30. and *chap.* 31.

You may obſerve like-

wiſe ſomewhat to this purpoſe in the ſtory of *Jonah*, when he was ſent to *Nineveh* about ſo weighty a matter as the ſafety of that great populous City, and that too, when their deſtruction was within ken, but forty days off; that he ſhould now make delays, and fly to *Tarſhiſh*; that upon ſuch a ſtrait he ſhould run himſelf into hazards, might ſeem to argue ſome careleſneſs and neglect in the Government of Providence. And yet this error of his was ſo wiſely

Jonah.

mana-

managed in the event, that it proved a great advantage to the main End of his buſineſs. For 'tis a probable opinion, That theſe Mariners who caſt *Jonah* into the Sea, were a ſpecial occaſion that his preaching was ſo ſucceſful afterwards; the *Ninevites* being by them informed, That this was that Prophet for whom they had lately ſuffer'd ſo violent a tempeſt; how the wind ceaſed, and all was calmed again, when they had once caſt him into the Sea, from whence

whence it was not poſſible he ſhould be delivered, but by a Miracle. And therefore they concluded, That this muſt needs be ſome man extraordinarily inſpired from above; and that his Preaching was not idle Threats, but ſuch as might juſtly fright them into that rigorous Faſt which afterwards we read of, both for Man and Beaſt. It being the wiſdom of Providence ſo to contrive it, that this offence of *Jonah* ſhould mightily advantage that End which

which it did ſeem moſt directly to oppoſe.

So likewiſe for that diſſention betwixt *Paul* and *Barnabas*, *Act.* 15. it might ſeem the moſt unſeaſonable breach that could poſſibly be imagined; when the Church of the Chriſtians was now in its beginning and infancy, that then the two chief Members of it ſhould fall at variance amongſt themſelves, was ſuch an untimely diſſention, that an Enemy could not wiſh them worſe. Nothing could more thwart the promulgation of the

Paul and *Barnabas.*

the Goſpel of Peace, than the contentions of thoſe that preach it. If that State which is already eſtabliſhed into
Mat. 12. 25. *a Kingdom, divided againſt it ſelf, cannot ſtand*; much leſs could thoſe ſmall beginnings think to encreaſe into a Church by diviſions.

And yet this likewiſe was ſo diſpoſed of in the event, that it did mightily conduce to the propagation of the Goſpel thorow the whole world: for by this means thoſe two parted aſunder, the one into *Cyprus*, the

the other into *Syria* and *Cilicia*, and like two mighty ſtreams ſpread themſelves ſeveral ways that ſo they might the better water the barren and thirſty corners of the world. Ver. 39, 40, 41.

Thus have you ſeen the Beauty of Providence in ſome rugged paſſages of it. 'Tis ſo in every other particular, though ſeeming unto us never ſo deformed. But *man cannot find out the work of God from the beginning to the end.*

For the further evidencing of this Truth, there Confirmation by Reaſon.

there are two grounds upon which 'tis bottomed, that being rightly underſtood and conſidered, will make the point very clear.

1. God is exactly careful of every thing.

2. He is infinitely wiſe, for the diſpoſal of all to the beſt.

Reaſ. 1. 1. God doth overlook all things by an eſpecial Providence. Eph. 1. 11. *He worketh all things after the counſel of his own will.* There is no event in the world but it is ordered both according to God's *will*, and

and by his *counſel:* Pſal. 135. 6. *Whatſoever the Lord pleaſed, that did he both in heaven, and in earth, and in the ſea, and in all deep places.* Not only in the *heaven*, where his glory is more eſpecially conſpicuous; but in the *earth* too, where matters ſeem to be full of confuſion: *and in the ſea, and in all deep places*, where we cannot ſo much as take notice of them. There is nothing ſo *great*, but is under His *Power*; nothing ſo *little*, but is within his *Care*. Thoſe actions

actions and events that ſeem unto us moſt *free*, *caſual*, *inconſiderable*, are all of them ordered by his Providence.

1. That which is *moſt free*, the hearts and affections of men do follow the guidance of his Decrees; Men may do after their own counſels and inclinations, but they are ſtill ſuitable to his Providence; there is nothing more in our command, than our thoughts and words; and yet both *the preparation of the heart, and the anſwer of the tongue, is*

is from the Lord, Prov. 16. 1.

2. That which ſeems moſt *caſual: The diſpoſing the Lot is from him*, Prov. 16. 33. He who is accidentally ſlain by another, is ſaid *to be delivered into his hands by God*, Exod. 21. 13. That caſual Arrow ſhot at random, was directed by Providence to fulfil the prediction of *Ahab's* death, 1 *King.* 22. 34. There is no liberty for Cauſes to operate in a looſe and ſtragling way; but in matters of greateſt uncertainty, there

there is a pre-ordained courſe of Effects.

3. *The leaſt, moſt inconſiderable things*, are not neglected by Providence. It was a * profane ſpeech of the *Aramites*, *That God was the God of the Mountains, not of the Valleys*, 1 King. 20. 23. Whereas he regards *the loweſt*, *the leaſt* thing, as well as the *greateſt*. The *young Lions*, Pſal. 104. 21. The *Ravens*, Pſal. 147. 9. are provided for by Him. He feeds the *fowls of the air*, adorns the *lillies*, and clothes *the graſs of the*

* Like that of the Poet, *Non vacat exiguis rebus adeſſe Jovi.*

the field, which to day is, and to morrow is caſt into the oven. Sparrows (you know) are but cheap birds; *Are not two of them ſold for a farthing?* Mat. 10. 29. *And yet not one of theſe do fall to the ground without your father.* He muſt give the Fowler leave to kill them; nay, when they are upon the wing in their frequent and often repeated motions; yet then it is He that muſt appoint them the time and place when and where they ſhall ſettle; and in this ſenſe alſo,

alſo, *not one of them doth fall to the ground without your father.* The hairs of your head are yet leſs obſervable, contemptible even to a Proverb, *Pili non facio, Ne pilo quidem melius.* And yet theſe, with God, are *inter numerata*, amongſt thoſe things whereof he takes an exact account.

That place 1 *Cor.* 9. 9 *Doth God take care for oxen?* doth not ſimply exempt ſuch things from the Law of His Providence; but 'tis *Argumentum à minori*, and

and doth imply his more eſpecial care of that higher rank of creatures to whom theſe are ſubordinate. The plain meaning of it is, That if God hath by a particular Law provided, *that the ox ſhould not be muzled that treads out the corn*; he will be much more careful of the labourers in his Harveſt.

'Tis recorded to the glory of ſome ancient Generals, That they were able to call every common Soldier by his own name; and careful to

to provide not only *Pay* for their Captains, but *Litter* alſo for the meaneſt Beaſt that did ſerve the Camp. Now you know there is not any Creature but is a Soldier to the Lord of Hoſts. He doth ſometimes muſter up an Army of Lice and Flies; and therefore 'tis but reaſon that his Providence ſhould take care for ſuch things alſo: why ſhould it not be as great an argument of His Power to preſerve and *order* theſe leſſer Creatures, as it was at firſt to *make*

make them? The creation of a glorious Angel did not coſt him more than that of a deſpicable Flye. Was it not He that out of the ſame primitive Nothing put that difference which there is amongſt ſeveral natures? And if the Painter in the ſame Piece draw a ſilken and a woollen garment, why ſhould he value the one above the other, ſince it was the ſame Art that did both make and diſtinguiſh them?

2. As his *Providence* doth extend to all *Reaſ.* 2.

things, ſo likewiſe does his *Wiſdom*. As he is exactly careful, ſo is he infinitely wiſe; and therefore as able for the contrivance of every the leaſt particular thing, as he would be if he had nothing but that to look after. If the Providence of God had but *one project* on foot, we could eaſily conceive how he might be able to drive that through all the windings and circumſtances of it, with care and wiſdom. Nay, we would truſt any wiſe man with the managing of *a ſingle buſineſs*,

buſineſs, when he had nothing elſe to diſtract his endeavours: But for all thoſe multitude of affairs amongſt Men and Angels; nay, for the very *circumſtances* and *manner* of all thoſe ſeveral actions and motions which are performed in every moment of time through the whole world; we cannot conceive but that in ſuch a tumult of buſineſs the eye of Providence may be ſometimes over-ſeen. But this ariſes from our miſtake of the Divine Nature; we meaſure God

by our own *finite abilities*; whereas we ſhould conſider, that that which is *infinite*, cannot be confined by Time, or Number, or Place; but is as well able at all times to look to all things, in all places, as if there were only one buſineſs to be cared for. You may ſee ſome imperfect reſemblance of this amongſt the Creatures. Do but conſider the *Sun*, how that at the ſame time, without labour or confuſion, it is employed in divers ſervices for all the Creatures under Hea-

Heaven: The diſtinctions of ſeaſons, the growth of ſeveral Plants, its various influence upon Minerals, the cheriſhing of living Creatures, with ſundry other ſuch variety of employments, which we are not able ſo much as to take notice of. Or elſe, do but mark the nature of the *Soul*, which at the ſame time perhaps doth *contemplate* Heaven, *direct* the body in its ſundry motions, *diſtribute* the food in a wiſe proportion to the ſeveral parts, not neglecting ſo much as

the leaſt hair about it, but ſupplying that with ſuitable nouriſhment. And all this it does without wearineſs or diſtraction. And if a Creature can do thus, much more then the Creator, who gives to every thing its proper ability, and doth actuate all things by a more immediate aſſiſtance than the Soul it ſelf. So that though we ſuppoſe *infinite occaſions*, (which notwithſtanding Creatures are not capable of) yet the Providence and Wiſdom of God is *infinite* alſo;

alſo; and there is the ſame proportion of infinite to infinite, as of one to one.

Now put both theſe Reaſons together: If the Providence of God be thus *exactly careful* of every the leaſt particular; If he be thus *infinitely wiſe* for the diſpoſal of all to the beſt; no wonder then, though *every Event in the world be both beautiful, and in its time.*

For the further clearing of this Truth, there are two *Doubts* or *Queries* to be reſolved, that ſeem to oppoſe it. Vindication from Doubts and Objections.

1. What's the reaſon why this *Beauty of Providence* doth not appear to us, but that many things ſeem ſo full of diſorder and confuſion in the world?

2. How may this conſiſt with the permiſſion of ſinful actions, which can neither be *beautiful* nor *ſeaſonable?*

I begin with the firſt, To ſhew the reaſon why in ſo many things we cannot diſcern this *Beauty of Providence.* The verſe of the Text tells us, *That man cannot find out the work of God*

God from the beginning to the end: That is, 'tis above humane capacity to comprehend the reaſon of all Divine proceedings; we cannot find them fully out from the beginning to the end. And ſo *Job* 9. 10. *He doth great things paſt finding out. Lo, he goeth by me, and I ſee him not: He paſſeth on alſo, but I perceive him not.* And again, Chap. 23. 8, 9. *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but*

I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him. The meaning is, that where ever *Job* turned his eyes, there were still some passages of Providence which he could not apprehend the meaning of. God hath reserved this as a peculiar prerogative to himself. *It is not for us to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power*, Acts 1. 7.

There may be a two-fold reason of this:

1. The obscurity of the things themselves.

There

There are *treaſures of wiſdom*, Col. 2. 3. not only for their *precious-neſs*, but for their *privateneſs* too; *hidden wiſdom*, 2 Cor. 1. 7. *ſecrets of wiſdom: And theſe are double to that which is* (as *Zophar* ſpeaks), *Job* 11. 6. That is, thoſe concealed Providences which we do not diſcern the reaſon of, are of much greater proportion than thoſe that appear. We read in that fore-cited place, *Ezek.* 1. 16. of *a wheel within a wheel*, ſignifying thoſe involutions & intricacies which there are

are in the ways of Providence. And the *Pſalmiſt* tells us, that *His way is in the ſea, and his paths in the great waters: and his footſteps are not known*; *Pſal.* 77. 19.

As it is in the works of *Nature*, where there are many common things of excellent beauty, which for their *littleneſs* do not fall under our ſenſe: They that have experimented the uſe of *Microſcopes*, can tell, how in the parts of the moſt minute creatures there may be diſcerned ſuch gildings and

and embroideries, and ſuch curious variety as another would ſcarce believe. Why, 'tis ſo in the works of *Providence*; there are very many paſſages of frequent daily occurrence, whoſe excellent contrivance doth not fall under our ſenſe or obſervation.

2. Our own ignorance and ſhort ſightedneſs; and that in a two-fold reſpect:

1. We cannot ſee that *end and drift* which Providence aims at in many particulars; and therefore no wonder though

though they ſeem unto us rude and uncomely. We meaſure things by this falſe balance of *Opinion*, which weighs only their *outſides*, and doth not look upon their *ends* and *relations*. Now the beauty of things doth conſiſt much in their tendency and reference to their proper ends. If an ignorant man that knows not the reaſon of a Wind-Mill or Water-Mill, ſhould look upon them only as places of *habitation*, he cannot think them welſituated, where they are ſo much expo-

expoſed to the violence of winds and waves: whereas he that underſtands how the wiſdom of the Artificer hath contrived thoſe motions unto *uſeful ends*, muſt needs confeſs a beauty and comelineſs in the work. 'Tis ſo likewiſe in the events of Providence, which none can rightly apprehend, but he that underſtands the ſpecial drift and purpoſes which they are deſigned to

2. We cannot ſee *the whole frame of things*, how ſundry particular Events,

Events, in a mutual relation, do concur to make up the beauty of the whole. He that can diſcern only two or three wheels in a Clock, how they move one againſt another, would preſently think, that there were *contrariety* and *confuſion* in the work. Whereas he that beholds *the whole frame*, and diſcerns how all thoſe divers motions do jointly conduce to the ſame end, cannot chuſe but acknowledg a wiſe order in the contrivance of it. So likewiſe is it in the *frame of times*;

times; where he alone is fit to judg of *particulars*, who underſtands how they refer to *the general*. But now *we are but of yeſterday, and know nothing, becauſe our days upon earth are as a ſhadow*, (ſaith *Bildad*) *Job* 8. 9. We look upon things according to a *ſhort ſucceſſion*, and ſo are not able to diſcern that beauty which there is in their references to other matters *afar off*. But now, *to God a thouſand years is but as one day*. He beholds all things, whether paſt or to come, in

Pſa. 90. 4.
2 Pet. 3. 8.

in the ſame *inſtant*. There is no *ſucceſſion* in eternity, but all things within the reach of time are *preſent* unto that. Though in the revolution of a Wheel, there be a mutual ſucceſſion betwixt the parts contained *in it*; yet an eye that is placed *without*, can at the ſame time diſcern the whole motion. Thus alſo is it in the revolution of Time; where, though there be a mutual ſucceſſion betwixt thoſe things that are contained *under time*; yet God, who is *without* and *above*

above it, doth at the ſame view behold all together. So that 'tis no wonder, though many things ſeem beautiful to him, which to us who are ſo ſhort-ſighted, may appear harſh and deformed.

2. The ſecond *Quære* was this: If there be ſuch an overruling Providence which doth diſpoſe of all to the beſt; How comes it to paſs that there are ſo many ſinful actions in the world?

To this I anſwer two things:

1. *When men thwart God's*

God's will of Precept, they ſerve his will of Providence. Thoſe particular Intereſts of Gain, Honour, Pleaſure, Revenge, which ſway mens deſires and actions, are wiſely contrived to the promoting of God's Decrees and Glory. When *Auguſtus* made the general Tax upon the World, His end was to enrich himſelf, and fill his Coffers. But God uſed it as a means to fulfil the Prophecy of Chriſts birth at *Bethlehem*. *Rehoboam*, and *Jehu*, and *Cyrus*, had all their ſeveral

ſeveral aims in thoſe works wherein they were ſubſervient to Providence. And they did ſtill accompliſh his counſel in proſecuting their own deſigns.

2. *That which in reſpect of man's execution is wicked and diſorderly, in reſpect of God's appointment is beautiful and comely.* There could not be any more horrid act, than the betraying and crucifying of our bleſſed Saviour; and yet even in this (as it was *decreed by the determinate counſel and fore-knowledg*

ledg of God, Acts 2.23.) there was the greateſt Miracle of Divine Wiſdom that ever was extended to the Creature: ſuch depths of Policy, which all the ſubtilty of Men or Angels was not able to *contrive*, no nor to *ſuſpect*, πολυποίκιλος σοφία, as the Apoſtle calls it, *Eph.*3.10. *Interchangeable wiſdom*, of *curious variety*, as the word ſignifies. Now if God could thus manage the *worſt* action of man to the *beſt* advantage of man, well then may we conclude, That every event

event of Providence is beautiful in its time.

I have now done with the *Explication* and *Confirmation* of the Text. In the *Application* it may be uſeful for theſe leſſons: *Applicat.*

1. For *Information*, and that in a twofold reſpect: 1. *Uſe* For Information.

1. It may teach us our duty to take notice of, and obſerve the works of Providence.

2. It may direct us what to judg of the affairs of theſe times under which we are fallen.

1. If all the events of

of Providence be ſo wiſely contrived, 'tis certainly then our duty to conſider and to take notice of them. *Pſal.* 111. 2. *The works of the Lord are great ſought out of all them that have pleaſure therein.* And again, v. 4. *He hath ſo done his marvellous works, that they ought to be had in remembrance.* Now a man cannot be ſaid to *ſeek out*, or to *remember* that which he doth not carefully obſerve. 'Tis the chief ſcope of that *Pſalm* to excite men unto this duty. And

David

David makes it a note of piety for men to delight themſelves in the contemplation of God's works. *to remember Him in his ways*, as the Prophet *Iſaiah* ſpeaks. This *Aſaph* found by experience to be a ſpecial Antidote againſt all diffidence and carnal fears; in the 77 *Pſalm*, when he was ſurpriſed with thoſe ſad thoughts, *Will the Lord caſt us off for ever? and will he be no more entreated? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?* &c. He preſently applies himſelf to this remedy, *v.* 11, 12. *I will remember* Iſa. 65.4.

ber the works of the Lord; ſurely I will remember thy wonders of old: I will meditate alſo of thy works, and talk of thy doings.

If a man were but well read in the ſtory and various paſſages of his life, he might be able to make an experimental Divinity of his own. He that is obſervant of Gods *former dealings* and diſpenſations towards him, may be thence furniſhed with a rich treaſury of experience againſt all *future* conditions.

There are very many duties that depend upon a right

a right underſtanding of the times. A man knows not how to order his ſervices of *prayer* and *praiſes*, without ſome obſervation and skill in theſe. It was a great commendation which was given to the men of *Iſſachar*, that *they had underſtanding in the times to know what Iſrael ought to do*, 1 Chron. 12. 32. and the ignorance of theſe the Wiſeman complains of, as being a very great evil, *Eccleſ.* 9. 12. *For man knoweth not his time; but as fiſhes are taken in an evil net, and as birds are caught in the*

ſnare: ſo are the ſons of men ſnared in an evil time, when it falls ſuddenly upon them.

Now this obſervance of Gods works and diſpenſations, is a duty always ſeaſonable, but more eſpecially in ſuch times as theſe. 'Tis commonly obſerved, that though ſmooth and peaceable times are beſt for the *Liver* the man that lives in them; yet times that are full of change and viciſſitude, are beſt for the *Writer*, the Hiſtorian that writes of them: ſo though quiet ſeaſons may beſt ſuit with our deſires and

and outward condition; yet theſe diſturbed, confuſed times, may be beſt improved by obſervation, and do moſt ſet forth the wiſdom of *Providence*.

The *common* Providence of God in the various ſeaſons and order of Nature, may afford excellent matter for contemplation; much more that *ſpecial* Providence of his in the guidance of humane affairs, which have been always managed with various wiſdom.

But eſpecially in his diſpenſations towards

theſe later ages, wherein there have been many new, unuſual emergencies, ſuch as our forefathers have not known.

How many ſtrange obſervable paſſages may a conſidering man pick out amongſt the affairs of theſe few laſt years? How ſtrangely hath the whole courſe of things both in Church & State, been turned about, beyond all mens imaginations! How hath God in every reſpect, and on all ſides, puſled the wiſdom of the wiſe, & enfeebled the ſtrength of the mighty, abating the glory of

all

all humane power, lifting Himſelf up above others, in thoſe things wherein they dealt moſt proudly, effecting great matters by deſpiſed means! What ſtrange ebbs and flows of hope have we known! When men have been moſt full of confidence, then ſome unexpected accident hath intervened, and diſappointed all: ſo that the wiſeſt men have been often put to ſtand at a gaze, not knowing what to judg of the iſſue of things: And (though we have not had leiſure to obſerve it, yet) there has

been ſomething equivalent to this in other Nations; the whole Chriſtian world being generally full of ſtrange Commotions. Now we may certainly conclude, That all theſe unuſual turns and changes of things, are not for nothing. There is ſome great deſign to be accompliſhed by them; 'tis our duty with *diligence* to obſerve the paſſages, and with *patience* to attend the iſſue.

2. This may direct us what to judg of the preſent times under which we are fallen. If it be ſo that

that every particular Event is ſo exactly regular and beautiful; hence then we may infer how all that confuſion and diſorder which ſeem to be in the affairs of theſe times, is not ſo much in the things themſelves, as in our miſtake of them. The *Roughest Seaſons* (though they may be unſuitable to our deſires) yet have in them a proper comelineſs as well as times of the *greateſt ſerenity.*

True indeed, the Scripture doth ſomtimes mention *evil days*; but this is not ſo to be under- Eph. 5. 16.

ſtood, as if Time in it ſelf could be evil, either *naturally*, for ſo God pronounced it good; or *morally*, becauſe 'tis not ſubjected to any Moral Rule; but only *accidentally*, in reſpect of our miſtake and abuſe of it; when either we judg of it according to our own *wiſhes*, or miſpend it according to our own *luſts*. 'Tis only unwiſe, unholy men, that make unhappy times.

2 Tim. 3. 1, 2.

As in the *works of Creation*, nothing is properly deformed, but every thing hath a peculiar beauty, according

to

to that rank and ſtation wherein 'tis placed: though in vulgar ſpeech we uſe to call a Toad and a Serpent ugly; yet that is only in reference to common eſteem: whereas in reſpect of the Univerſe they are as regular and comely Parts as any of the reſt; their outward ſhapes being ſuitable to their inward forms, and thoſe purpoſes for which they are intended. So is it likewiſe in *the ways of Providence*; thoſe deſigns that in reſpect of our apprehenſions are carried on by a cryptical involved

volved method, are yet in themſelves of as excellent contrivance, as any of thoſe that ſeem to be of more facile and perſpicuous order.

If a man in theſe times ſhall with his reaſon conſult only the outward face of things, they muſt needs ſeem full of irregularities and diſorders; when the ſpirits of men in the proſecution of the ſame ends and the pretence of *publick welfare*, ſhall be imbittered againſt one another, even to *publick ruin*: when there is *a violent perverting of judgment and juſtice*

Eccleſ 5.8

ſtice in a Nation, and *on the ſide of the oppreſſor is might: but the oppreſſed have none to comfort them.* Chap. 4. 1

When there is a total ſubverſion of thoſe degrees in which the order and harmony of things doth conſiſt, *Servants being on horſes, and Princes walking as ſervants on the earth: When the mountains are removed, and pillars of the earth tremble.* Eccl. 10. 7 Job 9. 5, 6 When Religion and Laws (which are the *foundation* of a people) *are out of courſe.* Pſal. 11. 6

And yet even in all this, there may be a deſign

ſign of Providence for our good. This is certain, All God's Promiſes to his Church are infallibly true, and all his diſpenſations (though never ſo croſs in outward appearance) have a tendency towards the fulfilling of thoſe Promiſes. And why ſhould not a man reſt himſelf in this belief?

In our natural enquiries after the *efficient* cauſe of things, when our Reaſon is at a ſtand, we are fain ſometimes to ſit down, and ſatisfie our ſelves in the notion of *occult qualities*; and therefore

therefore much more ſhould we be content to be ignorant in the *final* cauſe of things, which lye more deep and obſcure than the other.

Let no man then preſume to cenſure the ſeveral viciſſitudes and changes of things, as if they were unſeaſonable and ill contrived. Remember we are but ſhort-ſighted, and cannot diſcern the various references and dependences amongſt the great affairs in the world, and therefore may be eaſily miſtaken in our opinion of them. We do in this world (for the

the moſt part) ſee only the *dark ſide* of Providence. At the laſt and great day of *manifeſtation*, when the whole plot of Divine Love ſhall be laid open, then we ſhall be able to diſcern the *Beauty of Providence* in all the rugged paſſages of it; how *tribulation, diſtreſs, perſecution, famine, nakedneſs, peril, and the ſword, do all work for the beſt to thoſe that love God.* Rom. 8. 28. 35.

Judg nothing therefore before its time, 1 Cor. 4. 5. Conſider, *we cannot ſee the works of God from the beginning to the end.*

And

And you know there is a vaſt difference betwixt the *beginning* & the *end* of a building It may be our lots perhaps in theſe times to ſee only the *beginning* of the Fabrick; when the old frame is demoliſhed, the rubbiſh lies ſcattered about, the new materials being gathered into heaps. Poſterity perhaps may ſee the *end* of it, when all theſe confuſed preparations ſhal be made up into a beautiful ſtructure.

2. This may ſerve for *reproof* of two ſorts of perſons: For Reproof. 2.

1. Thoſe that do not obſerve

obſerve or regard the works of the Lord.

2. Thoſe that murmur and repine at them.

1. This may reprove thoſe that do not obſerve or regard the works of the Lord. 'Tis a great argument of infidelity and irreligion, when men let many remarkable Providences paſs by them without notice or obſervation: or when they look upon them only in a ſlight and ſuperficial manner, like thoſe whom the Prophet

Iſa. 42. 20. *Iſaiah* complains of, *Seeing many things, but obſerving not.*

This

This ſin of Inadvertency of God's various Providences, hath been oftentimes ſeverely *threatned* and *puniſhed* in Scripture, *Iſa.* 5.12. *Becauſe they regard not the work of the Lord, nor conſider the operation of his hands, therefore is my people gone into captivity.* And again, *Jer.* 12. 11. *The whole land is made deſolate, becauſe no man layeth to heart.*

The heavieſt Judgments that can befall a Nation, are *Captivity* and *Deſolation*. And yet they are both denounced againſt this ſtupidity and

and careleſneſs of ſpirit. And you may gueſs at the hainouſneſs of the ſin, by the greatneſs of the puniſhment.

'Tis a ſin, that is after a more eſpecial manner appropriated to wicked men, *Pſal.* 10. 4, 5. *The wicked through the pride of his countenance, will not ſeek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. Thy judgments are far above, out of his ſight.* Things that he never enquires after, or regards, as if he were not at all concern'd in them. *Quæ ſupra nos nihil ad nos:* He looks no further then

then ſecond Cauſes, unto which he aſcribes the ſucceſs or miſcarriage of Events; and doth not take notice of that Divine Providence, by whoſe influence they are guided. You ſee this is made the note of wicked men. And therefore, as we would avoid that *cenſure*, ſo ſtil it concerns us to avoid the *ſin*.

2. This may ſerve for the reproof of thoſe that murmur and repine at the works of Providence, that take upon them the Magiſterial judgment of Events; as if they could tell how to

to frame things much better, and to contrive the iſſue of things to greater advantage. How ordinary is it for men to diſcourſe thus concerning the great changes of theſe times? as if the unſearchable ways of God were to be judged before the Tribunal of Humane Reaſon: *Who art thou, O man, that diſputeſt with God* (ſaith the Apoſtle)? How deſpicable, in compariſon to His Infinite Majeſty and Wiſdom? If there be a Commonwealth amongſt Ants and Bees (as ſome Naturaliſts ſay there

there is), 'twould make a man ſmile to think, that they ſhould take upon them the cenſure of State-matters amongſt us men: and yet here the diſproportion is finite; whereas betwixt God and man 'tis infinite: *As the heavens are higher than the earth, ſo are my thoughts higher than your thoughts, and my ways than your ways.* Iſa 55.8,9

He that will take upon him to mend the contrivance of things, let him remember (ſays one of the *Stoicks*) that the firſt thing he is to do, is *to mend God*, to teach *Epictetus.*

teach him wiſdom and care. And if he ſhall think himſelf unfit for that, let him not preſume upon this. For conſider, Is not the Providence of God *exactly careful* of every thing? Is not He *infinitely wiſe*, to diſpoſe of all to the beſt? Are not all things *ſubſervient* to His Will? Why certainly then, (however matters may appear to us) yet nothing could have been better than it is. Every thing ſhall prove for the beſt, in reſpect of *His glory*, and (if we belong to Him) in reſpect of *our good* too. 'Tis

'Tis an obſervable check which *Solomon* gives to ſuch preſumptuous perſons as are apt to repine at, and cenſure the courſe of things, *Eccl.*7.10. *Say not thou, What is the cauſe why the former days were better than theſe? for thou doſt not enquire wiſely concerning this.* It ſhould ſeem, that thoſe flouriſhing days of *Solomon*, ſo very eminent for all kind of plenty and peace (*Silver being in Jeruſalem as ſtones, and Cedars as the Sycamore in the vale for abundance*), were not yet 2 Kings 20. 5.

F with-

without ſome moroſe repining ſpirits, who were ſtill maligning the preſent condition of things; and therefore no wonder if we find the like humour among men in other times.

This the Wiſe man doth here reprove, both by a *prohibition* and a *reaſon*.

1. A Prohibition. *Say not thou, What is the cauſe why the former days were better then theſe?* that is, Be not tranſported with that common humour of cenſuring & condemning the ſtate of times, and commending the

the times paſt; as if the courſe of Events were not managed by the ſame wiſe Providence now, which governed the world before. He doth not forbid men to enquire after the cauſe of publick ſufferings: For this is frequently elſewhere enjoined in Scripture, that upon the occaſion of any ſpecial judgment, we ſhould ſearch & try our hearts, conſider our ways, and our doings, labouring to find out the cauſe of God's diſpleaſure, that we may accordingly meet him in his ways.

But the meaning is, that we ſhould not take upon us the peremptory cenſure of times and diſpenſations, preſuming to condemn thoſe things which we cannot underſtand.

2. The Reaſon. *For thou doſt not enquire wiſely concerning this thing.* That's a figurative expreſſion, ſtiled a *Meioſis*, when a phraſe ſignifies much more than the naked words do import. The meaning is, 'Tis extream folly for men to take upon them the cenſure of Times and Providences, as if they

they were competent Judges of ſuch matters.

There are two places of Scripture that will make up a Syllogiſm to prove this Concluſion.

He that judgeth of a matter before he hath enquired into, and underſtands it, it is folly and ſhame unto him, Prov. 18.13. But now, *It doth not belong unto us to know the times and the ſeaſons which the Father hath kept in his power*, Act. 17. And therefore it muſt needs be folly to take upon us the Magiſterial cenſure of ſuch things.

Every day hath its pro-

Mat.6.34 per *evil*, as well the former as theſe; and every day hath its proper *advantage*, as well theſe as the former. The very dregs of time, if we endeavour to make a right uſe of them, may be redeemed into opportunity.

Eph.5.16.

There are two reaſons of mens offending in this kind:

1. When they look only upon ſome *particulars*, without the conſideration of their *proper end*, or *general frame*. Now 'tis true indeed, that ſome particular Events, *ſingly* looked upon,

on, may ſeem very prejudicial; but the whole *contexture* of affairs in their *co-operation*, ſhall prove for the beſt. *All things ſhall work together* συνεργεῖ *for good to thoſe that love God*, Rom. 8. 28.

But now 'tis above our capacity to comprehend the whole frame of things: And that is not diſorder in reſpect of the *whole*, which to us may appear ſo, being compared with ſome *particulars*. You know, that in the natural body the variety and diſſimilitude of parts, is requi-

red to the beauty of the whole; the roundneſs of the head, the length of the arm, the flatneſs of the hand; blackneſs in one part, and whiteneſs in another; all theſe being ſingly compared amongſt themſelves, though they may ſeem to argue ſome oppoſition and deformity, yet look upon them as they ſtand in relation to the whole frame, and it will appear how in their ſeveral ways they do each of them conduce to its comelineſs and order. If this lower World had in it no changes and varieties,

varieties, but were in all reſpects alike, it would not then be ſo properly κόσμος, a beautiful World, as χάος, a Lump or Maſs.

2. Another occaſion of mens offending in this kind, is, when they will judg of Events according as they ſuit with their own wiſhes. And in this caſe, 'tis impoſſible that every humor ſhould be ſatisfied, becauſe particular deſires (beſides their oppoſition to one another) will likewiſe be inconſiſtent with the general deſign. It would ſeem better perhaps to

every private man, if he himſelf were a Magiſtrate, or a King; and every common Soldier a Commander, or a General. But how could this conſiſt with the exigencies of the Commonwealth, or an Army, where there muſt be degrees, and diſproportion of places, according to the neceſſity of ſeveral employments? 'Tis ſo in the government of this great Univerſe: That difference which there is betwixt particular things and times, and perſons doth much conduce to the beauty and

conve-

conveniency of the whole.

'Tis our ſafeſt way then to conclude, That all matters are for the beſt, *beautiful in their times*, though to us they may ſeem full of diſorder and contrariety. Thus the Apoſtle, in that remarkable place, *Rom.* 11. 33. ſpeaking concerning the rejection of the Jews, when God would caſt off and deſtroy his peculiar people, and that for his own glory and advantage; he concludes *His judgments are unſearchable, and his ways paſt finding out: But*

of

of him, and to him are all things: As if he ſhould have ſaid, God will do this ſtrange work; and though for my part I know not the reaſon of it, *His judgments are unſearchable*, &c. yet ſure I am, that *of him and to him are all things*; that is, as the making of all things was *of his power*, ſo the reſolution of all things ſhall be *to his glory.*

Though *his judgments are as the great deep*, for their obſcurity and unmeaſurableneſs, not to be fathomed by our ſhallow apprehenſions, yet

yet *his righteouſneſs is as the ſtrong mountains*, for their eminency and ſtableneſs, *Pſal.* 36. 6. *Though clouds and darkneſs may be round about him, yet righteouſneſs and judgment are the habitation of his throne*, Pſal. 97. 2.

3. This may ſerve for *Exhortation*, To perſwade us unto theſe four duties. *Uſe* 3. For Exhortation

1. Not to be too haſty in our deſire or proſecution of any thing.

2. Nor to trouble our ſelves with any ſolicitous care about the ſucceſs of things.

3. To

3. To be equally prepared for all future Events.

4. To behave our ſelves with carefulneſs and contentment in all conditions.

1. Hence we learn, Not to be *too haſty* in our deſire or proſecuti- of any thing. God beſt knows the fitteſt ſeaſon for every Event; we ſhall have it when its time is come; and before that, 'twould not be beautiful: *Like ſnow in Harveſt* (as the Wiſe man ſpeaks) which though it might poſſibly be ſome *refreſhment* to our particular,

Prov. 25. 13.

cular, yet would be a *deformity* in the courſe of Nature.

There are ſome men whom the Prophet ſtiles of *a haſty heart*, במהריל *Iſa.* 35. 4. who are too heady and impatient in their hopes. And it is a weakneſs that ariſes from our infidelity and diſtruſt of Providence. *For he that believeth, maketh no haſte.* Chap. 28. 16. 'Tis God's uſual courſe to defer what he promiſes, thereby to exerciſe our faith, to put an edg on our deſires, and a value upon the bleſſing. In natural af-

Tranſlated *Fearful.*

fairs

fairs, we are fain to expect the proper ſeaſon and *maturity* of things; the Husbandman will wait for his Harveſt; he doth not expect to ſow and reap both in a day. It ſhould be ſo likewiſe in other matters. And ſince that is always the fitteſt time for every thing which God appoints, it will become us then patiently to wait his leiſure, and not with over-haſty deſires to run before him.

Abraham was fain to tarry a long time for a Son, *David* for a Kingdom, and the whole World

World for *Chriſt*. He that rightly underſtands the worth of any bleſſing, and his own want, cannot think much to wait for it. The poor man, at the Pool of *Bethesda*, being ſenſible of his own lameneſs, was content to tarry there Thirty eight years in hopes of remedy. Suppoſe a Promiſe were deferred to the utmoſt, yet do but compare the ſhortneſs of our lives with the duration of our ſouls, and then no delay can ſeem tedious. *Neq; enim eſt aliquid in tam brevibus vitæ metis*

ita

Boetius Consol. l. 4 *ita ſerum, quod longum expectare immortalis putet animus.* A man conſcious to himſelf of his own immortality, cannot think any time long which is confined within the narrow bounds of life.

Is there then any mercy which thou expecteſt? Do not overraſhly haſten it with any indirect project, as if thou wert able to help the Providence of God with wiles and devices of thine own. Though it be long in coming, yet it will come at laſt; it cannot be more ſlow than

than ſure. When *Iſaac* was laid upon the Altar, and bound for a Sacrifice, and his Father's hand lift up for the fatal blow, yet then there came a reſcue from Heaven, which would not have been ſo beautiful, if by any unlawful act it had been haſtned before that time, either by *Abraham*'s ſparing his Son, or *Iſaac*'s reſiſting his Father.

Joſeph did undergo a tedious impriſonment in the Land of *Egypt*; 'tis likely, being the Key-keeper, he might have taken his own time, and have

have ſcaped when he would; but then he had loſt his preferment: whereas by tarrying God's leiſure, he was delivered with advantage. Though *David* had been a long while anointed to a Kingdom, yet becauſe he did not uſe any haſty means for the enjoying of it, therefore did Providence clear the paſſage for him, and proſpered it to him afterwards. He might have killed *Saul* in the Cave, and *Abner* too, when he found them ſleeping; but then he had been overhaſty; 'twere better they ſhould

1 Sam. 24 11. 26. 17.

ſhould fall by their Enemies. *The Lord ſhall ſmite them when their day ſhall come to dye,* 1 Sam. 26. 10. And before that, 'twould be but raſhneſs to attempt it. And ſo likewiſe when he ſtopt himſelf in his haſte after *Nabal*'s life, you know within a while after God took him away by his own immediate hand, and gave both his Wife and Eſtate to *David.*

An over-forwardneſs in the haſtening of our hopes, is the ready way to imbitter them unto us. You know how much trouble

trouble and contention there grew from that haſty act of *Sarah*, when in her miſtruſt of the Promiſe, and fear of being childleſs, ſhe muſt needs give *Hagar* to *Abraham*.

So likewiſe for *Jacob's* too much haſte in getting the bleſſing by a wrong means, you know it coſt him afterwards many dangers, and a tedious exile. Whereas if he had tarried longer, God would have brought it about for him by a more eaſie and beautiful way.

God's time is the beſt; and

and he never fails his own ſeaſon: *I the Lord will haſten it in its time*, Iſa. 60. 22. For us to meaſure the fitneſs of ſeaſons by our own weak apprehenſions, is not this to ſet the Sun by our Dial? we are too ſhort-ſighted, apt to antedate the Promiſes. *The Lord will ariſe, and have mercy upon Sion, when the time to favour her, yea, when the ſet-time is come*, Pſal. 102. 13.

2. Hence we learn, Not to trouble our ſelves with any ſolicitous care about the ſucceſs of things. To ſerve Providence

dence in the uſual *means*, that is our work; but the *iſſue* and *event* of things, that's God's work, we have nothing to do in it. That which is not under our *power*, ſhould not be under our *care*. If there be nothing at our diſpoſal, but that all Events do depend upon an higher Providence, 'twere but a vain thing than to buſie our ſelves with hopes and fears about them. Much of the diſquietneſs amongſt men in the world, ariſes from hence, That they buſie themſelves about God's work,

Ver. 9.

work, and neglect their own.

Is there then an *evil* thou *feareſt?* why, 'tis not in the power of any creature to hurt thee. Though men ſhould uſe plots and threats againſt thee, yet they can do nothing. They ſate together, and counſelled againſt *David*, deviſing to take away his life, *Pſal.* 31. 13. But what was his comfort? why, ſaith he, *v.* 15. *My times are in thy hands, O Lord.* He knew that no ill ſucceſs towards him was in the power of others.

Or is there an evil

thou *feeleſt?* why, it comes from the hand of God. Be not then impatient at the Inſtrument. 'Tis but a childiſh curriſh thing to beat the rod or bite the ſtone that hurt thee. *David* could quietly undergo the railing of *Shimei*, when once he had diſcerned in it the Providence of God.

Or is there *a good thou hopeſt for?* why, it is not within the reach of thy abilities. And therefore 'twere but in vain to think thou couldſt command it by thine own endeavours.

We

We would count it a mad thing for one that is naturally low, to buſie himſelf in the ſtudy and labour of growing tall, becauſe this is not alterable by any thing in our power; *ſince no man can add one cubit to his ſtature.* Why, 'tis ſo in other things likewiſe; *God* doth as well ſet bounds to our *eſtates*, as to our *ſtatures*; and of our ſelves we can as little add one *penny* to that, as one *cubit* to this. And therefore, never let any one think that he can raiſe himſelf as he pleaſes, and be the

Maſter of his own Fortunes. Though he were furniſhed with the greateſt helps and probabilities of advancement; yet Eccleſ 9. 11. *the battel is not always to the ſtrong, nor the race to the ſwift; neither bread to the wiſe, nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all.* That is, there is a ſecret Providence, which doth ſo unavoidably diſpoſe of theſe lower Events, that the likelieſt means we can uſe, cannot promiſe us any certain ſucceſs.

They

They that with a compaſs-wiſdom will delay Events, that with fore-caſts and proviſions will bind Providence; for the moſt part, are not only diſappointed in what they hoped for, but do meet with a curſe inſtead of it. See that place, *Iſa.* 50. 11. *Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compaſs your ſelves about with ſparks, walk in the light of your fire, and in the ſparks that you have kindled; this ſhall you have of my hands, you ſhall lye down in ſorrow.*

3. Hence we learn to

be equally prepared for all future Events, not wiſhing for one more than another. Whatever comes to paſs ſhall be *beautiful*, and therefore ſhould be *welcome*. All things that befall us, ſhall lead us on to the ſame Journey's end, Happineſs. And therefore we ſhould not in our expectation of future matters engage our ſelves in the deſire of any particular ſucceſs; but with a *Traveller*'s indifferency (as *Epicte-*
Diſp. l. 4. c. 7. *tus* ſpeaks in *Arian*) who when he comes to doubtful turnings, doth not

not deſire one way ſhould be true more than another. So ſhould we entertain every thing that we meet with in our paſſage through this life; eſpecially ſince we are ſure that there is none of them but (if we belong to God) ſhall further us in that which is our main buſineſs, our *journey* to Happineſs. And therefore to be very ſolicitous about any particular ſucceſs, what is it but to limit and confine the power of God? nay, to prefer our own policy before the wiſdom of Providence;

as if we alone were able to diſcern what would be the beſt iſſue of things? Mark how the ſame Heathen beſpeaks ſuch a perſon: Thou fooliſh man (ſaith he) doſt thou not deſire that which will be moſt convenient for thee? And can there be any thing better than what God appoints? τί τὸ ὅσον ὅτι σοὶ διαφθείρει τὸν κριτὴν, παράγεις τὸν σύμβουλον. Wherefore by ſuch immoderate and eager deſires, thou doſt as much as in thee lies to corrupt thy Judg, and ſeduce thy Counſellor.

The

The *Stoicks* have many excellent paſſages to this purpoſe: *Nunquam ſapientem pœnitentia ſubit* (ſaith *Seneca*) *quia nihil melius illo tempore fieri potuit quam quod factum eſt.* A wiſe man is never troubled at any croſs Event; he knows nothing could have been better than it is. *Omnia illi ſuccedunt, nihil præter opinionem accidit.* All things are ſucceſful to him, he is diſappointed in nothing, becauſe indifferent to every thing. Whilſt others are toſſed up and down betwixt

De Benef. lib. 4. 34.

hopes and fears, his mind is eſtabliſhed.

Now if meer *Reaſon* could advance *Heathen* men to ſuch reſolutions, much more then ſhould a *Chriſtian's Faith* in the Providence of God, with thoſe many Promiſes wherein he hath an intereſt, raiſe his mind to this Heroick temper, and make him bend himſelf with a ſubmiſſive compliance unto every condition.

Obj. Obj. *But what then, may not a man (nay, ſhould he not) be very earneſt in his deſires and*

and prayers, for ſome particular deliverance or bleſſing?

I anſwer, Yes. But in all *temporal* matters, it muſt be ſtill with a tacit ſubmiſſion to the will of God, who knows better what is fit for us, than we our ſelves. See the example of *David* to this purpoſe, 1 *Sam.* 15. 25. He was there put to a very great exigence, his ſon *Abſolom* had ſuddenly raiſed a great Army againſt him, inſomuch as he was fain to flye for his life: There were ſome of the Prieſts Sol.

Prieſts adhered to him, and followed him with the Ark; but he, upon ſerious thoughts, deſires them to return again: For (ſaith he) *if I ſhall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and ſhew me both it, and his habitation. But if he thus ſay unto me, I have no delight in thee; behold, here I am, let him do to me as ſeemeth good unto him.* Here's no deep anxiety or æſtuation of ſpirit, no bitter exclaiming againſt his unnatural Son, and diſloyal Subjects; but a quiet ſuccumbency,

bency, an indifferent compoſure of mind, which reſolves to be content in every condition. He puts the caſe both ways, and is provided for either. If it prove after *this* manner, why then ſo; if *otherwiſe*, then thus. So true is that common Emblem, That every wiſe man is a *Cube* or *Dye*, not to be flung from his bottom. Let him be caſt any way, he ſtill lights upon his right *baſis*; whatever his *condition* may be, *Si fractus illabatur orbis*, yet his *mind* is ſtill calm and peaceable.

Obj.

Obj. Obj. *But would you have a man turn* Stoick? *ſhould he not be troubled at the afflictions that befall him?*

Sol. *Sol.* I anſwer: Yes: he muſt be ſenſible of his ſufferings, and conſequently cannot but grieve under them, eſpecially ſo far as his own ſin and neglect hath occaſioned them. But then it ſhould be his care to quiet his heart from immoderate trouble, by the conſideration of that wiſe Providence, who doth diſpoſe of all for the beſt. 4. Laſt-

4. Laſtly, Hence we learn, To behave our ſelves with *cheerfulneſs* and *contentment* under all thoſe conditions which the Providence of God ſhall think fitteſt for us. 'Tis the Wiſe man's own inference from the Text in the Verſes immediately after it: *There is nothing better, than for a man to rejoyce, and do good in his life; that he ſhould eat and drink, and enjoy the good of his labour.* For if every thing be beſt which God appoints, we have no reaſon then to be troubled at any Event. V. 12, 13. *Æquum eſt ut homini placeat, quicquid placet Deo.*

vent. What though it do croſs our deſires, yet 'twould not have been ſo well, if it had been otherwiſe. Things cannot be better with us than they are. *David* thought it a hard caſe, that his Child by *Bathſheba* muſt dye. But did he loſe any thing by it? Was it not better for him to have ſuch a legitimate Heir as *Solomon* was? We are but ill Contrivers of our own welfare, and therefore ſhould without murmuring ſubmit our ſelves and affairs to the government of Providence.

deuce. What though that do ſtraiten us in our deſires? you are content to let the *Phyſician* barr you of many things, becauſe he hath caſt your water, felt your pulſe. Conſider then, doth it not as much concern us to provide for the ſalvation of our ſouls, as the health of our bodies? or doth not God underſtand this, as well as the Phyſician that? what reaſon have we then to repine at his proceedings? He was a wiſe Son in *Plutarch*, who being told by a friend, That his Father would diſ-inherit

herit him, anſwered, *Non faciet niſi faciendum:* He will do nothing but what he ſhould. Thus ſhould a Chriſtian willingly reſign up himſelf in every condition, to the diſpoſal of Providence.

Do but apply this Conſideration according to the ſeveral occaſions of your lives. When your hearts are at any times amazed or dejected with the thought of the *publike* confuſions; remember, that God ſits in Heaven, obſerving and ordering all theſe inferior mo-

motions for the beſt.

And ſo too in the caſe of *particular* ſufferings, 'tis likely that there is not any amongſt you, but hath ſome kind of *private* trouble and grievance to which he is more eſpecially expoſed; either weakneſs of body, or too narrow a fortune, loſſes in your eſtates, diſappointment in your hopes, unhappy relations, or the like. And theſe things, as we are *men*, cannot chuſe but grate upon our ſpirits with ſome kind of harſhneſs and diſcontent. But now, as *beliefvers*,

vers, we have a remedy againſt them. For conſider, there is nothing befalls us by chance. All things are ordered by the deliberate counſel & fore-knowledg of God. He is as exactly careful of every one of us, as if he had nothing elſe to look after. Do not think that any trouble befalls you, becauſe he doth not regard; for his Care and Providence doth extend to all things: nor becauſe he *cannot* help; for He is Almighty: nor becauſe he *will not*; for He is equally infinite in all his

his Attributes: But becauſe his *wiſdom* finds that condition to be fitteſt for thee; there is ſomething amiſs which ſhould be mended. When the ſuperfluous humour is corrected, the Phyſical Potion ſhall be taken away. And 'tis not reaſonable to expect Phyſick and Health both together. When the wound is healed, the ſmarting-plaiſter ſhall be removed. And thou mayeſt confidently ſay with *David*, Pſal. 119. 75. *I know O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faith-*

faithfulneſs haſt afflicted me.

How happy might we be, if we could ſettle our hearts upon theſe Conſiderations?

FINIS.

The Beauty of Providence.

A 1324